

SEPTEMBER 14, 1972

Wet weather problems hit the Shortgrass Country before the skies cleared. Screwworms took an upswing as hornflies and stiffness broke out in every direction.

Our late lambs had been failing all summer. Needlegrass wrecked them in July. August stomach worms knocked off what was left after the needles were through. By the time those two scourges had taken their toll, the rest of the herd was so weak that the leaders were hanging up in cobwebs in the cedar bushes.

I thought for awhile that the lambs in the pastures cleared of brush were suffering from a Jack of shade trees. As you know, woolies are the same way about shade as alligators are about mudholes. Neither one will do any good unless they can shade up or wallow.

But the absence of shade wasn't the problem. When we put out fresh salt blocks at the waterings, seven or eight head of lambs could get in the shadow of the blocks.

Salt salesmen ought to add that advantage to their sales talk. I never had thought of it before, but it's handy to have an item that'll not only offer mineral supplement but protection from the sun to boot.

The lambs that had to be put in our feedlot aren't doing any better than the pasture lambs. Conversion rates have been running six to one. For every sick lamb that's recovered, six have died.

Empty medicine bottles are becoming a problem in the pens. It's mighty discouraging to be dragging out a dead lamb and sprain your ankle on the way to the pickup.

Buzzards have taken a permanent vigil at the feedlot. About a dozen of them are present every morning for the one-way check out period. They should be the healthiest carrion in the country; every feast they've had was like drinking a straight shot of antibiotic.

An old kid helping doctor the lambs asked for permission to shoot the buzzards. I told him I couldn't stand the sight of any more death. Living in the midst of a lamb wilting program over-satisfies a man's morbid curiosity. What I'd like to hear is the sound of feet clattering across some scales. Without those buzzards to polish off the bones, we would have a problem.

It's every bit my fault for putting those ill-fated lambs on feed. I was thinking this morning of how lucky ship captains are to go down with their mistakes.

Herders can't crawl under the bottom deck of a truck and go to the packers with one of their grand schemes that failed. My advice to young ranchers would be to hold your land under a fictitious name, then if the going gets rough you can leave the pot boiling for the next sucker to watch.

Green grass is going to erase such stunts as feeding cutback lambs. Only the beholders could tell you how beautiful our country is now.

Dews fall each morning. Sunrise highlights the greenery, creating a scene that surpasses our fondest dreams.

Old cows have that prosperous sheen that only strong grass can bring. Old ranchers don't look much better, but grass and paper riches would make a gold mine hard to trade for a young cow.

My wife's people, the Indians, called rich autumns "the season of the big turnabout." Had the redmen and the ranchers been able to share their problems, I think they'd have had an understanding.

Big turnabout is what we need and this year looks like our chance.